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Message Text

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PAGE 01 CARACA 12670 271851Z

71
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-07

DHA-02 /066 W
---------- 104564
R 271309Z OCT 76
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5370

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 12670

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SWEL, MOPS, VE, US
SUBJECT: THE FAV C-130 CRASH-GOV CONCERN OVER USAF ROLE

REF.: HQ USAF 191425ZOCT76, USDAO CARACAS
141448ZOCT76 (BOTH NOTAL)

SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE REVIEWS THE STATUS OF
THE VENEZUELAN AIR FORCE'S (FAV) INVESTIGA-
TION INTO THE C-130 CRASH SEPT. 3 IN THE AZORES AND
DISCUSSES THE REASONS WHY THE FAV'S ACCIDENT
INVESTIGATION BOARD MAY CHOOSE TO FIND THE USAF
PARTIALLY TO BLAME FOR THE ACCIDENT. END SUMMARY.

1. REFERENCED MESSAGES, NOT REPEATED TO THE DEPT.,
SUMMARIZED THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY WITH REGARD TO
WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE VENEZUELAN AIR FORCE (FAV)
INQUIRY INTO THE CAUSES OF THE C-130 CRASH IN THE
AZORES. DISCUSSIONS OF DAO AND MILGP PERSONNEL
WITH FAV OFFICIALS NOW LEAD US TO CONCLUDE THAT AT
LEAST SOME MEMBERS OF THE FAV ACCIDENT BOARD
WHICH CONDUCTED AN ON-SITE INVESTIGATION, AND
POSSIBLY THE WHOLE BOARD, WOULD APPARENTLY LIKE TO AND
MAY WELL CONCLUDE THAT THE USAF SHOULD SHARE AT
LEAST PART OF THE BLAME FOR THE CRASH. FIRST, A WEATHER
FORECAST FOR LAJES, RECEIVED FROM NAS BERMUDA ON
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PAGE 02 CARACA 12670 271851Z

SEPT. 3, PROVED TO BE OVERLY OPTIMISTIC AND IS CONSIDERED

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

BY THE FAV ACCIDENT BOARD TO BE ONE FACTOR LEADING TO
THE ACCIDENT. SECOND, THE FAV OFFICERS APPARENTLY
BELIEVE THAT THE GCA OPERATOR MAY HAVE MISDIRECTED
THE PLANE ON ITS FINAL APPROACH. THEY ARE PARTICULARLY
SUSPICIOUS BECAUSE THE PLANE REPORTED BY GCA TO BE
LEFT OF THE RUNWAY ON ITS FINAL APPROACH, ACTUALLY
CRASHED OFF TO THE RIGHT OF THE RUNWAY. WHILE ALL
THE INFORMATION WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE USAF
LEADS US TO CONCLUDE THAT THE GCA OPERATOR WAS NOT
RPT NOT TO BLAME, THE USAF DID NOT CONDUCT AN ON-SITE
INVESTIGATION BECAUSE NEITHER THE PLANE NOR CREW
BELONG TO THE USAF AND USAF REGULATIONS DO NOT
REQUIRE AN ON-SITE INVESTIGATION UNDER SUCH CIRCUM-
STANCES.

2. DAO OFFICERS OF THIS MISSION HAVE INFORMALLY
PRESENTED TO THE FAV COMMANDING GENERAL AND OTHER
FAV OFFICERS THEIR PROFESSIONAL OPINION ABOUT THE
PROBABLY CAUSE OF THE ACCIDENT, WHICH, BASED ON PARTIAL
INFORMATION, IS THAT THERE IS A LIKELIHOOD THAT PILOT
ERROR WAS THE PRINCIPAL CAUSE OF THE CRASH.
HOWEVER, THE FAV HAS APPARENTLY RULED OUT ACKNOWLEDG-
ING CREW ERROR AS THE PRIMARY CAUSE. THUS, THERE IS
A GOOD POSSIBILITY THAT THE FAV WILL ULTIMATELY CONCLUDE
THAT THE USAF WAS AT LEAST PARTIALLY TO BLAME. IT IS
ALSO LIKELY THAT THIS CONCLUSION MIGHT BE MADE PUBLIC.

3. AT THE TIME OF THE USAF AIRLIFT OF THE VICTIMS'
REMAINS TO CARACAS, THE FAV AGREED TO OUR REQUIREMENT
THAT IT PAY ALL COSTS. TO DATE, THE FAV HAS ALREADY PAID
FOR FUEL TAKEN ON AND GROUND-HANDLING COSTS INCURRED
IN VENEZUELA, BUT HAS NOT YET BEEN PRESENTED WITH THE
BILL FOR THE USE OF THE USAF AIRCRAFT. AT THE
PRESENT TIME, WE BELIEVE THAT ONLY A FEW FAV OFFICIALS
ARE AWARE OF THE REIMBURSABLE NATURE OF THE USAF
AS WELL AS THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE, HAVE CONCLUDED
THAT THE USAF RESPONDED QUICKLY AND EFFECTIVELY
IN A HUMANITARIAN GESTURE AT THE TIME OF A NATIONAL
TRAGEDY. THE USAF AIRLIFT MISSION RECEIVED WIDE
AND FAVORABLE PUBLICITY AND PRESIDENT PEREZ HIMSELF
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PAGE 03 CARACA 12670 271851Z

PUBLICLY THANKED THE USG FOR ITS ASSISTANCE
(CARACAS 10851).

4. THE USAF (REFTEL HQ USAF) HAS INFORMED US THAT
IT AGREES THAT TO PRESENT A BILL NOW FOR AIRLIFT COSTS,
NOTWITHSTANDING THAT SUCH HAD BEEN AGREED TO PRE-
VIOUSLY, WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT THE U.S. IMAGE IN
VENEZUELA. ACCORDINGLY, BY SEPTEL, EMBASSY WILL

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MAKE A RECOMMENDATION CONCERNING THE HANDLING OF
THE COSTS OF THE USAF AIRLIFT MISSION.
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